

Background

On average, about 23.9 million people living in 10.3 million households received food stamps in the United States each month in FY 2004. Food stamp households are a diverse group. Because food stamps are available to most low-income households with few resources, regardless of age, disability status, or family structure, recipients represent a broad cross-section of the nation's poor. This report provides information about the demographic and economic circumstances of food stamp households.

Findings

Most food stamp recipients are children or elderly. Over half (50 percent) are children and another 8 percent are age 60 or older. Working-age women represent 28 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represent 13 percent.

Many food stamp recipients work. Over one fourth (29 percent) of food stamp households have earnings, up from 19 percent in 1990. For these households, earnings are the primary source of income.

The majority of food stamp households do not receive cash welfare benefits. Less than one in six (16 percent) received TANF benefits, down from 42 percent in 1990. Twenty-seven percent received Supplemental Security Income. Almost one quarter (23 percent) received Social Security benefits.

Food stamp households have little income. Just over 12 percent are above the poverty line, while 40 percent have incomes at or below half the poverty line. Thirteen percent had no cash income of any kind. The typical food stamp household had gross income of \$643 per month and received a monthly food stamp benefit of \$196. Nearly one-fourth of monthly funds (cash income plus food stamps) available to a typical household come from food stamps.

Food stamp households possess few resources. The average food stamp household possesses only about \$143 in countable resources (including the non-excluded portion of vehicles and the entire value of checking and savings accounts and other savings).

Most food stamp households are small. The average food stamp household size was 2.3, but varied considerably by household composition. Households with children were relatively large, averaging 3.3 members. Households with elderly members tended to be smaller, with an average size of 1.3 people.

For More Information

Poikolainen, Anni (2005). *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2004*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

The full report can be found on-line at www.fns.usda.gov/oane.

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